

The Eagle & The Crescent

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Transition to Self-Reliance

Nov. 4, 2005

ISF making strides in Al Anbar

Capt. Jeffrey S. Pool
2nd Marine Division

CAMP BLUE DIAMOND, Iraq -- The 2nd Marine Division is progressively receiving the additional combat power its commanders have requested to conduct the counter-insurgency operations in Al Anbar province.

The new battalion-sized units flowing into the Western Euphrates River Valley are from the newly trained Iraqi Army.

This is a significant change compared to the number of available Iraqi Army units when the 2nd Marine Division took over from 1st Marine Division in March of this year. At that time, only Fallujah and Ramadi had Iraqi Army or Public Order Brigade presence.

Out west, on the other hand, near the sizeable Iraqi-Syrian border, only a platoon-size force was participating in operations.

According to the Division's commanding general, things are a lot different today.

"When we first arrived we talked about Iraqi Security Forces in terms of squads and platoons," said Maj. Gen. Richard A. Huck. "Now we talk about them in terms of battalions and brigades."

When the Iraqi Army units arrive at their designated location and marry up with their partnered unit, they are not capable of performing at the same level as the hardened Marine Corps infantry battalions. Nor is it expected that they ever be.

"Our goal is not to make Marines out



Cpl. Ruben D. Maestre

FALLUJAH, Iraq -- A Marine infantryman from Echo Company, 2nd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, and Iraqi soldiers assigned with 4th Company, 2nd Battalion, 2nd Brigade, Iraq Intervention Force, conduct a foot patrol here recently.

of the Iraqi soldiers," said Huck. "They just need to be good enough to defeat the terrorists."

The Division's plan is very straightforward: train, integrate and operate with all of the Iraqi Security Forces which include the Iraqi army, Iraqi police, Highway Patrol, Border Defense and Public Order Brigades.

"The Marines and Soldiers assigned to the 2nd Marine Division understand that we won't be the ones who win this counter-insurgency, it will be the Iraqi soldiers," Huck continued. "We do this by partnering our battalions with Iraqi battal-

ions. This is the way we're going to win."




Over the course of the last several months, Marines and Soldiers have conducted operations throughout Al Anbar. The goal of these operations has primarily been to disrupt insurgent activity and gain control of key cities. As a result of these recent operations, the Division and Iraqi Army maintain a presence in Haditha, Haqlaniyah, Barwana, Hit, Rutbah, Sa'dah and eastern Karabilah, in addition to Fallujah and Ramadi.

This physical presence denies local

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FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY
 Low: 57F High: 82F Sunrise 0626C Sunset 1710C ILLUM 6%	 Low: 62F High: 76F Sunrise 0626C Sunset 1709C ILLUM 13%	 Low: 50F High: 71F Sunrise 0627C Sunset 1709C ILLUM 22%	 Low: 52F High: 75F Sunrise 0628C Sunset 1708C ILLUM 32%

By Gunnery Sgt. Steven L. Saxton

Letters to the Editor:

*I have really enjoyed reading your articles written about the Marines at different places in Iraq. I try to read the Web site several times a week.

I currently have two sons who are serving in Iraq somewhere around Fallujah. One is a 2nd Lt. and the younger son is a lance corporal; they are with different units and have actually run into each other twice. It is also great to see the photos, so we have some idea of what the living conditions, etc. are there.

Thanks for your service.

Debbie Abelson
Former Sgt. USMC

*Hello my name is Shelia Gosa and my son, Pfc. Brandon Gosa is now stationed in Al Asad, Iraq and is part of the 5/14 MP Bn. I printed the article and I'd like to mail it over there.

It would be good for their morale and they need any positive reinforcement they can get. So, thanks for a great article, Brandon is just 1 of 120 U.S. Marines from the Waterloo, Iowa unit. These special young men are from the ages 18-25.

Shelia Gosa
Mom of a Marine
Silvis, Ill.

*I just wanted to send this e-mail to say thank you from the bottom of my heart to all the Marines.

May God bless and protect each and every one of you, and may you come home safe and soon! You are all in my thoughts and prayers forever! I am so grateful for your service and sacrifices for all Americans.

With many good wishes and sincere appreciation.
Semper Fi, Kat Guillen

Free holiday messages to troops

Stars and Stripes newspaper is hosting a free Holiday Message posting service online at Stripes.com.

Many of the messages submitted online by the early deadline of Nov. 28 will appear in the Dec. 17 edition of Stars and Stripes (selected on a "first come, first served" basis). All messages submitted by Dec. 9 will be published online beginning Dec. 18.

To send a free message, visitors may go to Stripes.com and click on the Holiday Messages button, any time from Nov. 1 to Dec. 9.

Stars and Stripes is equipped to publish only those messages received online and in English. Every effort will be made to print all the messages received for Middle East, Europe and Pacific recipients.

II Marine Expeditionary Force (FWD)

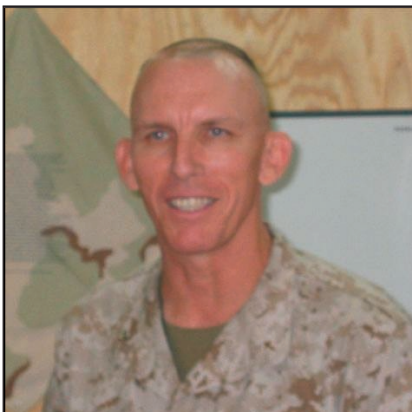
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The Power to Overcome

Chaplain (Cmdr.) Alan M. Hansen
II Marine Expeditionary Force (FWD)



I am reminded of an incident and a patient in a hospital psychiatric ward I worked in at Naval Hospital Jacksonville, Fla. The patient was a large and very well built man who had been admitted for his psych problems.

Some staff members were concerned about his visible muscular stature and powerful size. There was a real concern he was so large, that some

considered the possibility of violent behavior on his part.

After the psychiatrist counseled with him, he found him to be a non-

threat to those on the ward and those around him. We were informed the patient never acted in a violent manner despite his size, because he believed he had no strength and often spoke about his weaknesses both mentally and physically.

I just wonder how many people who claim to know God are like that patient? They have the where-with-all (spiritual power), and yet they do not see and fully understand the power that lies within them.

The power of an Almighty God! I hear many people pray for strength and the ability (power) to overcome certain situations such as debt, alcoholism, broken relationships, and the list goes on.

Please know there is plenty of power. We simply need to allow God to control our lives and change our situations, positions, and problems with his power. Let us trust in his

power to change our circumstances, our problems and our lives. To that end, I pray you may be reminded that your strength comes from high!

**'Our sufficiency
(power) is
from God.'**

2 Corinthians 3:5

Fallujah Church Service Schedule

PROTESTANT WORSHIP SERVICES

Sunday:

Protestant Worship 9 a.m. CLB-8 theater

Protestant Communion 9:15 a.m. Base Chapel

Contemporary Worship 10:30 a.m. Base Chapel

Gospel Service 1 p.m. Base Chapel

Latter Day Saints (Mormon) 8:30 a.m. Camp Workhorse

Latter Day Saints (Mormon) 6:30 p.m. Camp Workhorse

CATHOLIC MASS / CONFESSIONS

Catholic Confession Sun. 7:15 a.m. Base Chapel

Catholic Mass Sun. 8 a.m. Base Chapel

Catholic Mass Mon. 6 p.m. Base Chapel

Catholic Mass Tues. 6 p.m. Base Chapel

Catholic Mass Wed. 6 p.m. Base Chapel

Catholic Mass Thurs. 6 p.m. Base Chapel

Catholic Mass Fri. 6 p.m. Base Chapel

Catholic Confession Sat. 5:15 p.m. Base Chapel

Every second counts as Greyhawks save lives

Cpl. Cullen J. Tiernan
2nd Marine Aircraft Wing (FWD)

AL TAQADDUM, Iraq -- The 'golden hour' is the amount of time they have to save life, limb or sight. Every second faster they move could mean the difference between life and death.

With this mentality, the Greyhawks of Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 161, 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing (FWD), constantly strive to improve the speed with which they respond to urgent casualty evacuations at Al Taqaddum, near the cities of Fallujah and Ar Ramadi.

After three deployments in as many years, the Greyhawks are becoming experts at moving fast to get their CH-46 Sea Knights in the air and save lives, said Col. Robert E. Clay, the airboss of Al Taqaddum and Pensacola, Fla., native.

"As soon as they rolled in, they were the fastest moving squadron I'd ever seen," said Clay. "The casevac alarm goes off and these guys are professionals, moving with a real sense of urgency. A couple of minutes may not seem like much, but try not breathing or bleeding for that amount of time."

Clay stressed that as soon as the Greyhawks arrived, they set the bar for how urgent casualty evacuations are conducted.

The Greyhawks took control of the mission Aug. 15, nine days ahead of schedule. As of Oct. 28, they have moved 442 patients.

He said it has taken less than four minutes from notification to launch for these Marines and their Navy corpsmen counterparts. The standard operating procedure calls for 30 minutes.

"Every time we get a call, we know lives depend on us," said Lt. Col. Robert M. Brassaw, the commanding officer of HMM-161 and Cape Corral, Fla., native. "These Marines understand their mission and are consistently launching birds in under five minutes. They are doing that routinely and safely."

Brassaw said each Greyhawk experiences something different daily and every day they know they are making a difference.

"When the casevac alarm goes off, they don't know if they are going to come under fire," said Brassaw. "They don't know if they are going to the point of injury or moving someone who has already received medical attention, but they move with the same speed and intensity for every mission."

The Greyhawks' missions include flying wounded and sick U.S. service members, Iraqi soldiers, civilians and insurgents. They fly with the same speed for the lives of anyone they can help.

"If someone needs to be rescued we're there for them," said Lance



Cpl. Cullen J. Tiernan

Conversing with the pilots, Lance Cpl. Isaac Aven-dano, crew chief, Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 161, 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing (FWD), and Ventura, Calif., native, helps land a CH-46 Sea Knight safely at Ar Ramadi, Iraq.

Cpl. Daniel J. Burman, an airframes technician with HMM-161 and Brentwood, Calif., native. "Civilians in the city of Baghdad aren't hostile. They are just in the wrong place at the wrong time. We are there for them, to save their lives."

Burman's duties include inspecting the aircraft's hydroelectric systems, ensuring they are safe to fly.

"It's amazing how fast we spin these rotors," said Lance Cpl. Joseph P. Berry, crew chief with HMM-161 and Missoula, Mont., native. "It gets everyone's blood pumping. That's what sets off our

speed. There are different squadrons that have done this mission, but we strive to be the fastest ever. There is nothing better than flying in Iraq and saving people's lives."

In September, Berry flew in casualty evacuation missions for more than 100 hours, the most in the squadron. He said from the commanding officer to the lance corporals, the Greyhawks are all focused

on their mission of saving lives.

"Every day, I have something to wake up for," said Lance Cpl. Adam Timar a crew chief and Tetonia, Idaho, native. "Being out here has been very eye-opening. Every day you are doing something for someone. I've seen a lot of people with a lot of medical gear hooked up to them. I know my job is important and that every second counts."

***'Every time we get
a call, we know lives
depend on us.'***

Lt. Col. Robert M. Brassaw
Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 161

Seabees help fight in Ar Ramadi

Lance Cpl. Wayne Edmiston
2nd Force Service Support Group (FWD)

AR RAMADI, Iraq -- 'We build, We fight,' is the motto of the famed, fighting Seabees of history. As long as the Navy has participated in land operations, the Seabees have been there to build.

The war in Iraq is no different for the Seabees here. The Sailors of Naval Mobile Construction Battalion-3 from Detachment Camp Taqaddum, Iraq are currently operating on Camp Corrigedor in downtown Ar Ramadi.

"It's not a great place to be," said Petty Officer 1st Class Joe P. Maioriello, officer in-charge of NMCB-3 at Corrigedor. "But there is a job to be done."

The Seabees of NMCB-3 are here to help reinforce and build some new structures to improve conditions at Corrigedor, then move to Camp Lion, an Iraqi Security Force camp, to help build there, said Maioriello.

To many of the Seabees, being out here on the front is exactly what they have always trained to do.

"Being out here is what the Seabees are designed to do," said Seaman Clayton M. Kuhn, a constructionman with the detachment, and Warren, Ore., native.

The Seabees are a group in the Navy that strays away from the normal traditions of the sea-borne 'blue side' Navy.

This mission has kept Seabees at the front lines alongside the other services for many years, Maioriello said.

"When many people think of the Navy, they think of water," said Petty Officer 3rd Class Charles C. Keen, a welder with the detachment. "The four and a half years I have been in the Navy, I have never been on a ship."

Serving so often with other branches of the Armed Forces is an aspect of the job they have come to embrace.

"I've worked with the Marine Corps

in the past," Maioriello said, a Saratoga, N.Y., native. "I wouldn't have it any other way."

As a group, the Seabees work very closely and are always working together.

"We are a pretty tight group, and everybody supports each other in every way," Maioriello said. "That's what you need in an environment like this one."

Many of the Seabees chose their line of work

in order to learn a specific job school to carry them when they return to the private sector.

"I joined the Navy for the trade," Maioriello said. "I could [have] joined the Navy to load torpedo tubes, but I can't

find a job in the civilian world that does that. As a Seabee I have a trade I can use in the outside world."

Even for the young Seabees, the skills they learn here are something they plan on using outside the Navy.

**'Being out here is
what the Seabees are
designed to do.'**

Seaman Clayton M. Kuhn
Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 3

"I've always wanted to be an electrician," Kuhn said. "So when I joined the Navy, my father told me to go learn something, and now I am an electrician."

No matter where the fight is, the Seabees ensure they will be there to build, and continue fight alongside the Marines, he said.

"We will go anywhere, and build anything," said Kuhn.



Lance Cpl. Wayne Edmiston

Petty Officer 3rd Class Tony J. Marchefka (left), Seaman Robert J. Rogers (center) and Petty Officer 3rd Class Isaac R. Ramirez work on a structure at Camp Corrigedor here.

Injured Marine returns to duty

Cpl. James D. Hamel

2nd Marine Aircraft Wing (FWD)

AL ASAD, Iraq -- Gunnery Sgt. Rose M. Noel, electronic counter measures repair center noncommissioned officer-in-charge, Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron 26, is the ultimate family person. One of her families is in the United States and includes her children and mother. Her other family is the Marine Corps, and more specifically, her fellow Marines in MALS-26.

Something happened Aug. 27 that threatened to take her away from both. After returning from a brief vacation in Qatar, Noel was on her way to draw a weapon from the armory. She was almost there when an indirect fire round impacted near her.

"I immediately thought, 'this is going to ruin my day,'" she said. "I knew I had been hit by something, but I thought it was debris that had been kicked up. I went straight to the armory and said I had been struck by IDF."

The armorer on duty knew immediately Noel's injury was very serious. He radioed for a vehicle to transport her to the hospital. Meanwhile, he gave her a green T-shirt to slow the bleeding.

"It was a pretty good bandage," she said.

When she got to the hospital, everyone had taken cover in the basement and it seemed deserted. After calmly asserting her need for help, someone came to administer medical attention. Her last memory was in an Al Asad hospital room, preparing to fly to Balad.

Back at the squadron's compound, Noel's officer-in-charge, Capt. Jeffrey S. Clemons, had grown a little worried.

"When the IDF hit, I knew she was on the way to the armory," he said. "About 45 minutes after it hit, I found out she had been hit and I went to the hospital immediately."

As Noel lay unconscious in a hospital, the MALS-26 sergeant major prayed at her bedside. Minutes later, Clemons and another Marine from the squadron loaded Noel into a helicopter for the flight to Balad, where she would receive further care.

The doctors in Balad planned to send Noel to Germany, and then back to the United States. With a one and a half inch piece of shrapnel lodged in her cheek, the doctors wanted to remove it surgically, wire her mouth shut and end her deployment pre-



Cpl. James D. Hamel

Brigadier Gen. Robert E. Milstead, Jr., 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing (Fwd) commanding general, congratulates Gunnery Sgt. Rose M. Noel after presenting her the Purple Heart.

maturely. But the 17-and-a-half year Marine Corps veteran wouldn't have it. As the doctors found out, sending her home was about as possible as wiring her mouth shut.

"From what I understand, I was very beligerent about wanting to return to my Marines," she said. "My jaw was broken, but I never shut up."

Though the opportunity to cut a year-long combat tour would be enticing to some, it never crossed Noel's mind.

"The Rosie in me would have wanted to go home, but the (gunnery sergeant) Noel wanted to return to her Marines," she said. "I think the (gunnery sergeant) in me kicked in as soon as the IDF hit."

Clemons, who characterized Noel as a well-spoken, outgoing Marine, said her desire to return to her duties is indicative of her character as a Marine.

"Her emphasis as soon as this happened was on showing the Marines that no matter what, we can still come back and serve the Marine Corps," he said. "She was very strong, but I wouldn't expect anything less from someone like her."

The doctors were forced to relent, and sent Noel back to her work. She did get a trip home, a scheduled two-week leave period where one of her sons commented on the

"coolness" of her battle scar. Noel became one of the few female service members to receive the Purple Heart, Oct. 29, the nation's oldest military award.

Despite the level of award, Noel asked for a subdued ceremony that included her final reenlistment. Her only desire was for a large crowd of Marines to be present, not for her fame, but so they could see a living reminder of the danger they face.

"Not a whole lot of MALS Marines are wounded in action," she said. "I think this makes it more real, and for them, it's a good experience."

After presenting her the award, Brig. Gen. Robert E. Milstead, Jr., commanding general, 2nd MAW (FWD), referenced her two families, and told the assembled Marines they should draw inspiration from Noel's continued service despite personal injury.

"If this doesn't do something to you, you're dead," he said.

As for Noel, she's just happy to get back to work and finish the job she came to do.

"Each day is a gift," she said. "Of course everyone wants to get home, but I want it to be on my own terms, not the insurgents' (terms). I'm here. I'm back in the fight. That's what (gunnery sergeants) do. That's what Marines do."

Utah native continues family legacy

Lance Cpl. Josh Cox

II Marine Expeditionary Force (FWD)

CAMP FALLUJAH, Iraq -- Growing up, a young boy looked up to his grandfather, a Bronze Star recipient who served in the Army during World War II, and grew up to follow a legacy that he continues today in Iraq.

Corporal Quinnon W. Duke, 27, said his grandfather's service in WWII called him to pursue a career in the military, and the nobility of the Corps motivated him to become a Marine.

"My grandfather was a strong man with good morals," he said. "He was successful in life. He fought in many campaigns during WWII, to include Guadalcanal. I knew that I wanted to be a successful person with strong values. Even after he had a stroke that confined him to a wheelchair, he pushed on for another 12 years; this is how he inspired me."

"I joined the Marine Corps because I wanted to be the best," said the Logan, Utah, native.

Duke, a manpower analyst, supports manpower information database software, and teaches administrative Marines how to utilize and operate the crucial software here.

The 1996 Logan High School graduate initially served as a reserve Marine while attending Utah State University, and worked in restaurants during the late 1990's.

In 2001, Duke, who is currently with Manpower Information System Support Office 11, II Marine Expeditionary Force, Headquarters Group, II MEF (FWD), decided to transition to active duty because he enjoyed his career in the Marine Corps.

"I liked the Marines, and I decided that is what I wanted to do," he said.

Before deploying to the Middle East in August, Duke served in Chicopee, Mass., assigned to Marine Wing Support Squad-

ron 472, and in Kansas City, Mo., with MISSO 16-17.

"Massachusetts was a culture shock," he said. "I never really spent time on the East Coast. I reenlisted while I was there."

While serving in Kansas City, Duke was augmented to II MEF to support Operation Iraqi Freedom here.

"I enjoy the work I do," he said. "I have the pride of being a Marine."

Duke said his job requires him to instruct others on the manpower software, which can be challenging.

"The challenges are introducing new systems, and giving classes," he said. "I'm definitely not a public speaker."

Even though Duke isn't keen on public speaking, he overcomes the anxiety in several ways.

"Practice, study and hard work are the only ways to overcome it," he said.

Duke's superiors have picked up on his attitude for success.

"Cpl. Duke is capable of communicating on any level," said Master Gunnery

Sgt. Terry L. Slater, staff noncommissioned officer-in-charge, MISSO-11. "He is an outstanding instructor and truly enjoys passing on the experience he's gained. I would love to work with him any time, anywhere."

Duke said he is glad to be a part of Operation Iraqi Freedom, and looks forward to reading about the events in history books.

"To me, it's good to know I'm a part of a world event; part of freeing a country from oppression," he said. "...part of a big event that will go down in history."

Like many Marines serving in the Corps today, Duke is working to become an expert in his field, and is pursuing a college education in conjunction with his duties in the military.

"My goal is to become proficient enough at what I do to become a warrant officer," he said. "In the meantime, I'm working on an electronic engineering degree."



Lance Cpl. Josh Cox

Corporal Quinnon W. Duke, 27, said his grandfather's service in World War II called him to pursue a career in the military, and the nobility of the Corps motivated him to become a Marine.

Company L helps with humanitarian mission

Cpl. Shane Suzuki
2nd Marine Division

AR RAMADI, Iraq -- Marines from Company L, 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines recently assisted members of the local Iraqi Security Force and 6th Civil Affairs Group in delivering more than \$500,000 of medical supplies to the Women's and Children's Hospital here Oct. 25.

Operation Doctor is an example of the new philosophy the battalion is using to win the support of the local people. The idea is that the Marines need to stay in the background while the ISF shows the townspeople that they are a viable and potent force that can protect and serve them, said 2nd Lt. Luke Larson, commander, 3rd Platoon with Company L.

"It went very well," he said. "We had

the ISF take the main effort; they handled the liaisons, much of the security and the unloading of the medical supplies. They did a very good, professional job."

This approach of putting the ISF in high-visibility positions while Marines mentor and wait in the background for worst-case scenarios was used during the elections Oct. 15, and was very effective in boosting the confidence of the ISF and helping to prove to the local citizens that their own Iraqi army isn't too far away.

"They handled the mission very well," said Larson. "I think all the training we've helped them go through is starting to pay off."

During Operation Doctor, the Marines sent an advance party ahead to search for improvised explosive devices and to secure the neighborhood before the main

effort of the operation delivered the supplies to the hospital and representatives from the Ministry of Health. When the advance party finished scouting the area for threats, a platoon of Marines arrived and immediately took up security positions while the company of ISF soldiers began setting up immediate-area security around and in the hospital.

"I think overall, the actual mission went very well," said Capt. Rory Quinn, company commander for Company L. "Everything went to the schedule we had, we had no casualties and the supplies were delivered to people who need them."

After the ISF on site gave the all clear, the supplies were delivered, along with another company of ISF soldiers who unloaded the truck. When this was completed, the Marines and ISF left the site, escorted by Weapons Company's Combined Anti-Armor Team Blue and Company L's Weapons Platoon.

"A large portion of what we did today was help a vital Iraqi government agency do well in the eyes of the Iraqi people," said Maj. Dan Wagner, team chief for Team 4, 6th CAG. "We are here to help the Iraqi people take charge of their own country. That's the advantage we hold over the insurgency and why we are going to be ultimately successful here."

With the success of humanitarian missions such as Operation Doctor, and political events such as the recent Constitutional Referendum, the people here can feel more confident in the abilities of their ISF, said Quinn. While the battalion continues to fight the insurgency through military means, the ISF are an integral part in winning the support of the populace.



Cpl. Shane Suzuki

Marines from 3rd Platoon, Company L, 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, walk through the Women's and Children's Hospital during Operation Doctor Oct. 25. The humanitarian mission was led by local ISF soldiers and included more than \$500,000 worth of medical supplies for the people of Ar Ramadi.

ISF, from Page 1

insurgents and foreign fighters the ability to carry out their campaign of murder and intimidation against Iraqi citizens. The Iraqi soldiers also provide language skills and an in-depth understanding of the local culture that far surpasses that of their U.S. counterparts.

"By partnering with Iraqi Security Forces we are gaining a lot of insight previously denied to us," said Huck. "We could walk down the same street ten times and not notice anything out of place, but an Iraqi soldier will notice something his first time on the street. It is not uncommon for them to stop a patrol and say 'those men over there have Syrian accents' or 'that graffiti is anti-government propa-

ganda.' Having the ISF out with us is truly a force multiplier."

The Iraqi Security Force's continued expansion throughout Al Anbar brings an entirely new dynamic to the division's operational capability. Their increased presence not only improves the security and stability within the province but also lays the foundation for transitioning the battle space from coalition forces to Iraqi units. Ultimately, their assumption of security responsibilities within the province, and the country for that matter, will allow for less coalition force involvement. This is but one step toward Iraqi independence.

"We have a plan, and it is working," said Huck. "We just have to continue executing that plan."



Staff Sgt. Brenda L. Varnadore

An Iraqi Soldier from the 1st Battalion, 2nd Brigade of the 7th Iraqi Army Division passes out toys to children while on patrol in Hit, Iraq, Oct. 14. The Soldiers were trained by the 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing (FWD) Military Transition Team.

Marine learns the importance of gear

Sgt. Jerad W. Alexander
2nd Marine Division

CAMP AL QA'IM, Iraq -- The 3rd Mobile Assault Platoon took sniper fire all day as they conducted a relief in place with 1st Mobile Assault Platoon.

As Lacey Springs, Ala., native Lance Cpl. Bradley A. Snipes, antitank assault man, 3rd MAP, Weapons Company, 3rd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, sat in the turret of his humvee watching his assigned sector behind his M-2 .50 caliber machine gun, it happened.

"We were doing a relief in place with [1st MAP] and had been taking sniper fire across the wadi all day," said Snipes, the 21-year-old, 2002 graduate of Brewer High School, said. "I was sitting in defilade, just my head above the turret when it felt like someone hit me in the head with a baseball bat."

The sniper had shot Snipes square in the side of his head, hitting him directly in his Kevlar helmet.

"I was in shock, I didn't know what happened. I remember thinking 'Am I still here?'" he said.

Snipes dropped down in the turret. It was at that point he realized he was, in fact, still with the living thanks to his helmet. While inside the cab of the humvee, another shot tore through one of the handgrips of his .50 caliber machine gun, partially shattering it. The sniper then began focusing on the vehicles tires.

After a moment, he composed himself and raised his 5-foot-11-inch frame back up into the turret to engage the sniper with his machine gun.

According to Cambridge, Ohio native 1st Lt. Jeremy S. Wilkison, platoon commander, 3rd MAP, his platoon's organic firepow-

er and a 500-pound bomb from air support eventually silenced the sniper.

Bradley Snipes' life, though, was saved by his gear.

"I was really surprised. It's supposed to be able to stop a 7.62 mm round at long distances. Well, it did," he said. "The gear works, don't doubt it. This is proof."

Currently, Snipes, who is a veteran of combat operations in Afghanistan, is trying to keep his helmet as a memento.

"I want to put it in a case with a plaque that says 'The little bullet that couldn't.'"



Sgt. Jerad W. Alexander

Lacey Springs, Ala., native Lance Cpl. Bradley A. Snipes, antitank assaultman, Weapons Company, 3rd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, stands with the helmet that saved his life.